



## **News Release**

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### **Healthy Weight is Everyone's 'Business'** ***More Men Overweight/Obese Than Women***

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Maintaining a healthy weight is a struggle that touches every demographic group – regardless of age, sex, race or religion. But you might be surprised to know that in Utah, as in the rest of the U.S., more men than women struggle with being overweight or obese.

“Sixty-eight percent of men in Utah are overweight or obese, compared to 51 percent of women,” reports Mike Friedrichs, Utah Department of Health (UDOH) Epidemiologist.

Those numbers come from the UDOH 2007 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey – a phone survey that asks Utahns to report their health status and behaviors. The survey found that, by age 40, nearly 3 in 4 Utah men are at an unhealthy weight. Health professionals are asking themselves why this number is so high despite all the efforts to create healthier environments and educate people about the dangers of obesity.

“It may be that more health messages are aimed at women, when they really should be reaching out to a broader audience,” says Dr. Richard Bullough, Program Manager, UDOH Diabetes Prevention and Control Program.

Utah lawmakers have recognized that unhealthy weight is a statewide issue and have named April 2008 Obesity Awareness Month in Utah. The goal is to increase education and prevention of obesity by urging businesses, communities and schools to develop campaigns to address the issue.

“We know that making the healthy choice the easy choice in the places that we live, work and play can have an impact on weight. Encouraging changes in these environments can make a real difference,” says Bullough.

Many Utah companies are already promoting worksite wellness programs for their employees and seeing positive results. Harman Music Group (HMG), an international company with 350 employees in Sandy, is in the middle of a 12-week Weight Watchers at Work program.

“We’ve found that the sedentary nature of jobs and lifestyles today have really impacted our workers’ health,” said Sharon Howard, Human Resources Representative at HMG. “The key to our success has been convenience. Running the program in-house during work hours really makes a difference, as does the supportive environment we’ve created.” So far, 32 employees have lost a combined 420 lbs. in eight weeks.

“We decided to focus on weight loss since it impacts so many aspects of wellness - blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes to name a few,” said Howard. “Also, the company has subsidized the cost of the program to employees. If employees meet their goal, the company will reimburse them for the cost of the program. Having a self-funded plan, we have a vested interest in keeping our health care premiums as low as possible.” She added, “Our next step to wellness is to add a walking program for employees.”

For more strategies to reduce obesity in Utah, visit Tipping the Scales (<http://health.utah.gov/obesity/docs/Blueprint.pdf>), The Utah Blueprint to Promote Healthy Weight for Children, Youth and Adults.

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*The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.*